



Rhode Island Rivers Council
c/o RI Water Resources Board
One Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908
www.ririvers.org



Minutes of the December 11, 2013 Meeting
RI Department of Administration
William Powers Building – One Capitol Hill
Conference Room B
Providence, Rhode Island

ATTENDANCE:

A. Members Present

Veronica Berounsky (Chair)
Rachel Calabro (Vice Chair)
James Cole
Walt Galloway
Paul Gonsalves
Judith Hadley
Chuck Horbert
Guy Lefebvre
Lisa McGreavy
Elise Torello

B. Guests in Attendance

Tom Borden, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
Ames Colt, Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Coordinating Team
Alicia Lehrer, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Marcia Pena, Buckeye Brook Coalition
Denise Poyer, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

1. Call to Order

Dr. Berounsky called the meeting to order at 4:10 pm

2. Review and Approval of November 13, 2013 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Hadley moved to approve the minutes as amended. Mr. Galloway seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Tom Borden, Director, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)

Mr. Borden provided a summary of his background and experiences leading up to his new position as Director of the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program. Mr. Borden highlighted NBEP initiatives that correlate well with those of the Rivers Council including a new grant program to support Narragansett Bay and its watersheds, a new science advisory panel to be chaired by Dr. John King, partnership with Watershed Counts with a focus on beach closures, and work on the 5-year update to the status and trends report that will look at gaps in monitoring needs in the state. Mr. Borden also noted that the other two NBEP staff positions will be filled in the upcoming months. Mr. Lefebvre lauded the additional representation from Massachusetts on the expanded NBEP management committee noting that 60% of the Narragansett Bay watershed falls within Massachusetts. Mr. Lefebvre noted that out of the RIRC designated councils, the Blackstone River Watershed Council has the largest geographical ties with Massachusetts and encouraged the NBEP to support the Blackstone area and legislative efforts to make the Blackstone River Valley a National Historical Park. Mr. Borden echoed the sentiment adding that new members on the NBEP management committee include individuals representing in the Blackstone Valley as well as the Taunton River watershed. Ms. Poyer asked whether the NBEP would be including watersheds that do

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not drain directly to Narragansett Bay in their scope of work such as the Wood-Pawcatuck River Watershed which is an environmentally important watershed with an active council. Mr. Borden responded that he doesn't know yet how broadly the NBEP can work outside of the bay's watershed but he does not want to exclude watersheds since the management techniques might be the same. The NBEP began as just a bay watershed initiative but has expanded its scope although it is unclear to what extent. Mr. Borden echoed the sentiment that it is important to be proactive in pristine areas and will be interested in learning more about whether any gaps exist from a data and management perspective. Ms. Hadley asked what role will NBEP have working with councils on fish passage projects and Mr. Borden responded that while he needs to become more familiar with the topic, he knows that Rhode Island has a great interest in fish passage restoration.

4. Update on Local Watershed Councils Re-Designation Process

Ms. McGreavy reported that the 5-year re-designation process for the Narrow River Watershed Association and the Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone has been completed. Certificates will be sent to the two councils with a cover letter from Dr. Berounsky. Dr. Berounsky spoke on the importance of councils in maintaining their RIRC designations as it makes councils eligible to receive RIRC grants and gives councils legal standing before town and state agencies such as DEM, CRMC and Statewide Planning who are required to notify councils when a project in their watershed is before them; however, councils need to have contacted the appropriate agencies and request that they be notified. Dr. Berounsky will be sending letters to all the designated councils to remind them that this needs to be done.

5. Update on Local Watershed Councils Grant Program

Ms. McGreavy reported that grant award letters and contracts for all nine approved grants have been sent out for signatures. Once they are returned they will be forwarded to the Department of Administration who will issue the checks which is expected to take approximately 3 weeks.

6. Reports by RIRC Representatives on State Committees:

a. Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP) – Walter Galloway

Mr. Galloway thanked Mr. Borden for providing a thorough account of NBEP objectives and initiatives.

b. State Guide Plan Advisory Committee – Rachel Calabro

Ms. Calabro distributed the draft chapter outline of the State Guide Plan/WQ element and said that she spoke with Ernie Panciera of DEM who raised the question about how to include the RIRC classification plan in the guide element which is meant to incorporate statewide policies that are overlapping and eliminate redundancies. Ms. Calabro explained how the RIRC has a governing statute in the law but the classification plan is a separate policy. Some elements of the classification plan will be included in the guide element however many of the RIRC policies are general in nature and can be included in other areas of the guide. Mr. Lefebvre provided some history on the classification plan noting that it was created in the 1990's and was supported by both DEM & CRMC but never really took hold. He did not believe the classification plan was being used much today although some towns may refer to it in their comprehensive plans. Ms. Calabro said she would like to keep the pristine river classification in the plan (ex. headwaters) as they need additional support, as well as keep the open space classification. We do not want to lose the recreation section either; however, recreation goals could be included elsewhere. Ms. Calabro will send out an email to the full RIRC and all designated watershed councils and ask them for feedback and encourage them to look at how the classification plan addresses rivers in their own watersheds. Ms. Poyer added that she has referred to the classification plan before town boards and finds it a solid and useful tool to refer to especially when the topic is headwaters and pristine streams. Mr. Galloway suggested that a subcommittee be formed to work with Ms. Calabro to make sure we don't lose anything important in the plan. Mr. Horbert noted some rivers have improved since the classification plan was created due to improvements in wastewater treatment. Ms. Calabro would like the group to consider how the classification plan could be incorporated into regulatory permitting requirements. Mr. Borden echoed Ms. Calabro saying the only way for something like the classification plan to have teeth is to include it in the regulatory setting noting the State of New Jersey has instituted a 300-foot regulatory buffer for pristine rivers. Mr. Galloway added that Ken Payne who led an effort to create the RIRC statute (and will be speaking at the RIRC in January) may also have ideas on the future of the classification plan. Dr. Colt said one thing to look at is whether the classification system would shed light on the water quality

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in currently unassessed waters which are many. Another idea is to include the classification plan in the guide's appendix. Ms. Calabro asked for council members to join the subgroup to meet and coordinate feedback to Mr. Panciera and Mr. Galloway, Mr. Horbert, and Mr. Lefebvre volunteered. Ms. Calabro said that there is some time to respond since she estimated that the guide group would be getting to the habitat section sometime in Feb/March.

c. Bays, Rivers & Watersheds Coordinating Team (BRWCT) – Veronica Berounsky

On behalf of Dr. Berounsky, Dr. Colt reported that the BRWCT has been working on a number of important initiatives such as stormwater finance and phase 3 of the Narragansett Bay CSO abatement project. The State Guide Plan work is needed to set policy for the state's water resources and will be helpful in updating the BRWCT's Systems Level Plan which will synthesize the goals of the guide plan. The BRWCT is concerned with monitoring gaps identified in the 2012 Lakes Management Report which called for a full time person working on lake management in the state however no funding has been allocated to date. Also, the BRWCT has been discussing possible funding assistance for the RIRC in the future.

7. News of activities in Local Watershed Councils:

Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association as reported by Ms. Poyer

Kenyon Dam fish passage via a rock ramp project is almost complete. A Champlin Foundation grant was received to renovate WPWA buildings and WPWA offices will be closed in January and February. DEM approved a new WPWA portage trail. The National Wildlife Foundation grant for a summer 2013 program which provided kayak lessons to 240 inner city youth was a great success and WPWA is looking for funding to repeat the program next summer. The Wild & Scenic designation bill is pending in the US Senate and may need to be re-introduced in 2015 if passage does not occur in 2014. Last year's RIRC-funded teacher training program, run in conjunction with the Narrow River Preservation Association, was well received by those who attended however the number of teachers who turned out was lower than expected. The program took place on four Saturdays from January to April, at no cost to participants along with all materials and refreshments, provided training and certification in Growing Up Wild; Project Wet; Waters, Wetlands & Water Quality; and Watershed Science for Educators.

Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council as reported by Ms. Lehrer

The WRWC's current main focus has been working on improving and expanding the bike path that runs from the Providence Place Mall to Eagle Square along Kinsley and Promenade Streets including work to make better connections, adding signage, and managing invasive plants. Fish passages are completed on the first four of five dams along the Woonasquatucket River with 90% completion at the 5th dam (called Manton Dam) which needs additional funding to complete the work. A Bike Camp that was held for 8 weeks this summer for inner city youth was very successful. The camp provided lessons in bike riding and safety and gave each participant a bike along with a helmet and lock. The WRWC is looking for funding to repeat the program next summer. Ms. Poyer reported on a joint project working with Ms. Lehrer to develop urban river volunteers trained in fish monitoring with a focus on the differences in dissolved oxygen at dams between upstream and downstream sites. The program took place on six sites in three urban rivers: Woonasquatucket, Moshassuck and the Ten Mile Rivers.

Salt Ponds Coalition as reported by Ms. Torello

The SPC's current main focus has been working with CRMC, Save the Bay, and towns of Westerly and Charlestown to apply for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation habitat resiliency grant which is due January 31, 2014. The proposal will contain a three-prong approach including: dredging in and near the Charlestown Breachway using the dredged materials for marsh and wading bird habitat restoration plus beach nourishment; a planning and design component to develop shovel-ready projects for dredging and marsh and wading bird habitat restoration; and beach nourishment work in the Quonochontaug and Weekapaug breachways when future funding becomes available.

Buckeye Brook Coalition as reported by Ms. Pena

The Coalition is doing winter water monitoring of Buckeye Brook with URI Watershed Watch and for the first time has added measurements of total dissolved solids and glycol which is used in the de-icing of planes. Results have shown the glycol levels to be very high and efforts are being made to educate the public on the concerns of the glycol levels.

Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone as reported by Ms. Hadley
The "Knotweed Knockout" project and clean up efforts continue with the assistance of the newly purchased 4-wheel vehicle. The annual holiday party has been scheduled.

Narrow River Watershed Association as reported by Dr. Berounsky

Work continues on putting up signs for shellfish closures to make sure the public is aware the whole River is closed to shellfishing. An article about that will be in the NRPA Newsletter coming out in December.. An eagle has been spotted on the river.

8. Committee Reports

Signage for Trail Heads & Crossings: Mr. Cole is developing a spreadsheet with locations that need signs including locations near ponds and rivers. Cost estimates received are \$10 - \$20 for each 12"x12" sign. After the holidays, Mr. Cole will be contacting councils for their input.

Founding of the RI Rivers Council: Mr. Lefebvre provided RIRC with a copy of the fifty-six page document: *Final Report and Recommendations, Lieutenant Governor's Task Force on Rivers, February, 1990, Roger N. Begin Lieutenant Governor, W. Edward Wood, Chairman*. Mr. Lefebvre recommended that RIRC make a digital version of the document to place on the RIRC website with a link on the "about" page, and that RIRC members briefly review the document prior to meeting with Ken Payne who was instrumental in passing the legislation that created RIRC in follow-up to the report's recommendations. The document is available on the RIRC website at <http://ririvers.org/pdf/LGTaskForceRivers1990RS.pdf>

9. Officer Reports:

Dr. Berounsky reported that she has been in contact with Ken Burke and Kathy Crowley of the RI Water Resources Board who indicated their interest in RIRC activities and plan to attend meetings in the future.

10. Other Business:

Ms. Hadley asked if anything should be done regarding terms of three RIRC members expiring on January 1, 2014. Council members noted that in the past, members have agreed to stay on until their terms have been renewed, or until they are replaced. Dr. Berounsky will check with the Governor's office to see what, if any, actions need to be taken at the January meeting to make sure council members can continue.

Dr. Berounsky asked whether designated watersheds are required to submit annual reports to the RIRC as stated in the bylaws. Discussion ensued regarding the value of annual reports as a good tool for documenting and communicating council activities each year noting that most councils already prepare an annual report for their members. Ms. Hadley suggested that the RIRC request that councils submit annual reports for adoption at the January meetings. Dr. Berounsky and Ms. McGreavy will check on 2013 grant final reports from the designated watersheds and see if anything could be included at the January RIRC meeting.

All agreed to designate the January meeting as the official annual meeting of the RIRC. Mr. Galloway will contact Mr. Ken Payne about speaking about the origins of the RIRC. Representatives from all the designated councils will be encouraged to come and report on their watershed activities.

Ms. Poyer raised an idea for a project that she is very interested in which is coordinating with RIDOT to have signs identifying rivers on all bridges with river-crossings in the state similar to what other states have done. Ms. Calabro noted that previous attempts by Save the Bay and was told that the bridge would have to be on a DOT road. It was noted that previous RIRC member Lori Urso was able to have RIDOT install watershed signs and Mr. Lefebvre was able to coordinate with RIDOT to install a Pawtuxet River sign on Route 95 where it intersected with the river. Ms. Calabro offered to look into the matter and report back to the council.

11. Chair's Report

Dr. Berounsky noted that pertinent issues had already been discussed.

12. Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Cole moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Hadley. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 pm.